A brief guide to developing respectful researcher-participant relationships

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Notes from the editors

Our zine will reflect upon the issues you might stumble upon as a researcher, in the relationships you establish with your participants. It is not to be taken literally, but rather with a pinch of humor, as we will be mostly reflecting on existing examples in ethnography, of what kind of relationships should you avoid. Nevertheless, we hope it brings you some guidance.

Your editors,
Marika, Paula & Ingrid

Ethics codes AAA

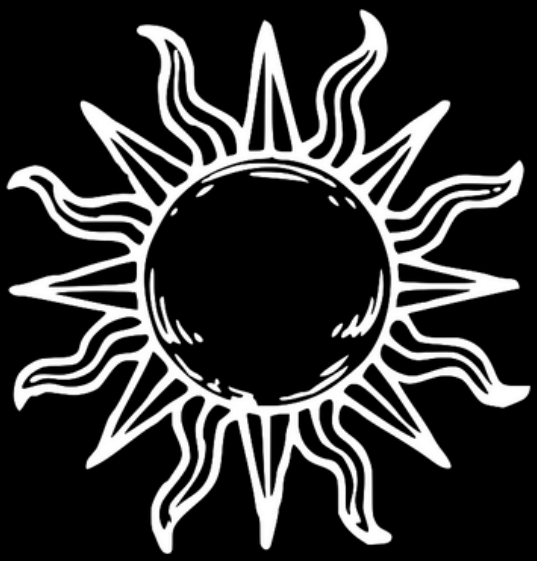
The American Anthropological Association is the largest legal entity for professional anthropologists. Its main involvement happens with relation to public issues, and the most pressing problems of the field. It also takes care of providing anthropologists with access to information about the ethics in this field.

The Association's Principles of Professional Responsibility include:

1. Do No Harm
2. Be Open and Honest Regarding Your Work
3. Obtain Informed Consent and Necessary Permissions
4. Weigh Competing Ethical Obligations Due Collaborators and Affected Parties
5. Make Your Results Accessible
6. Protect and Preserve Your Records
7. Maintain Respectful and Ethical Professional Relationships

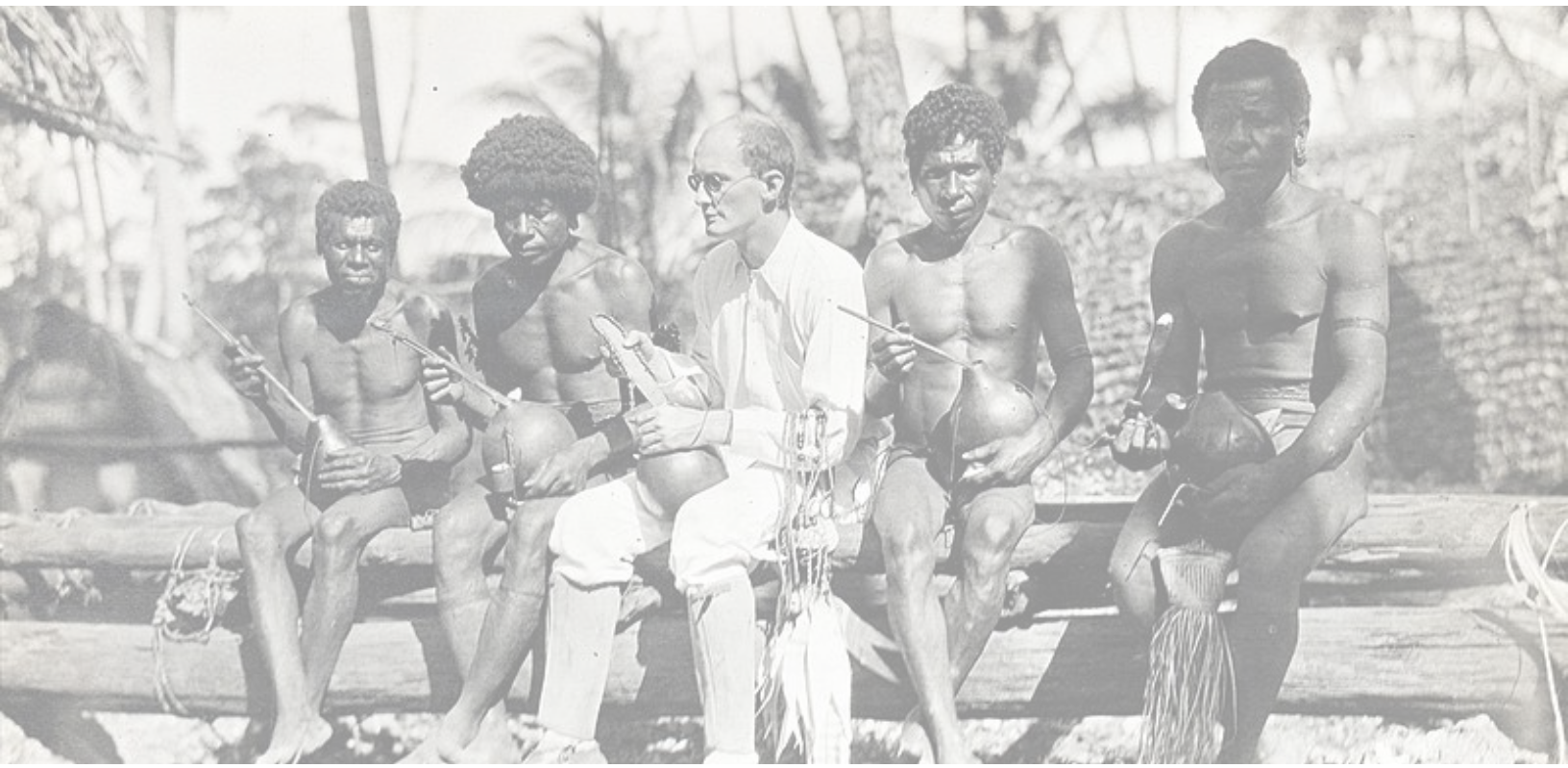
In the seventh subpoint, the AAA mainly focuses on urging researchers to promote "an equitable, supportive, and sustainable workplace environment" (AAA Web Admin 2012) in all relationships that are established during fieldwork. Both these with colleagues, participants, students, assistants, and other members of personnel, etc.

Hey! But it's not always that easy



Research differs from each other, and before entering the field you cannot foresee many obstacles that you may run into. It is thus important to have the AAA codes in mind, but have enough critical thinking and common sense to be able to adjust them to certain situations.

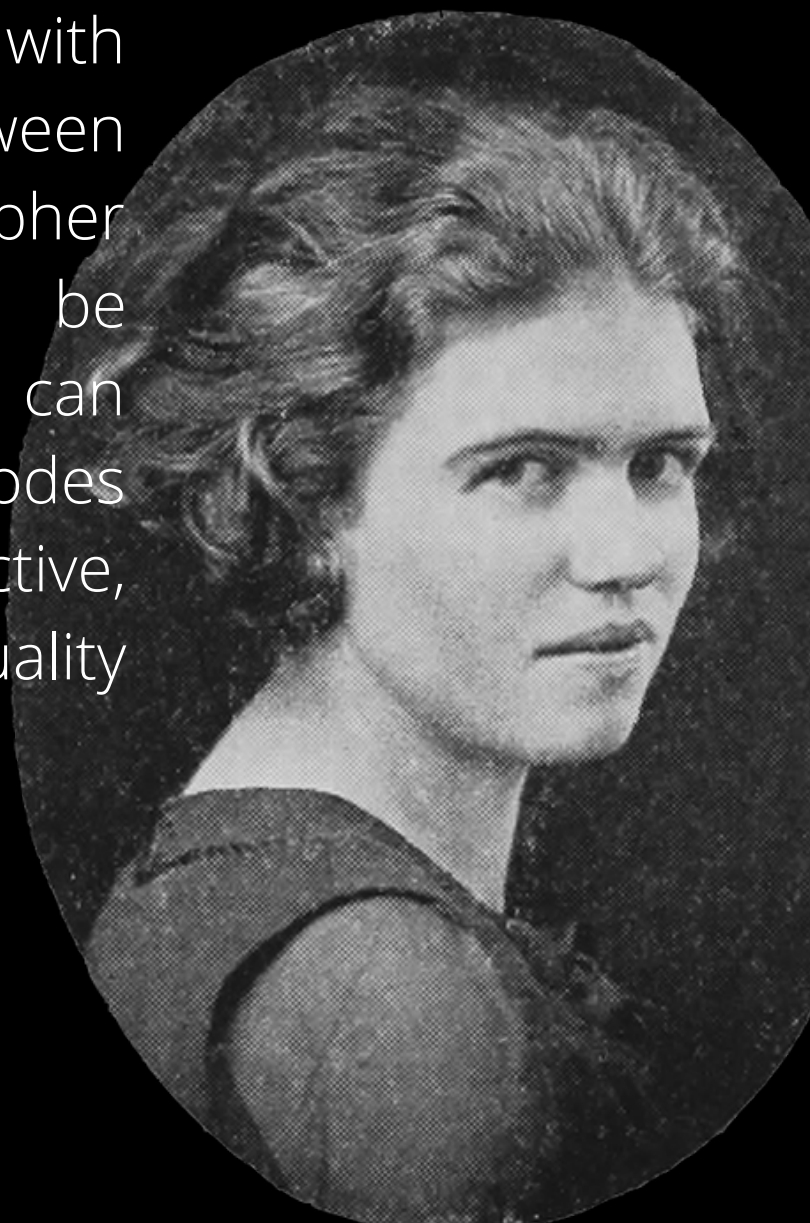
So? Maybe not what to do, but rather what not to do



There are however some things that you shouldn’t do under any circumstances. Things such as: taking on the habits of the participants, marrying your participants, and becoming too immersed in your research, wouldn't be accepted under any circumstances and can take a toll not only on your research but also on yourself and your participants. So what you should avoid is:

Do not go too native

Going native is to immerse yourself in the lifestyle, norms and habits of your participants' community, in order to accurately represent them. However, an issue with method is the lines between your job as an ethnographer and native may be blurred.Going to native can breach many ethics codes and make you less objective, thereby harming the quality of your ethnography.



Do not get overly emotionally involved with participants' situations.

In 2014 Alice Goffman published “On the run”, which was about young black men in Northeast Philadelphia. Goffman was too emotionally involved in the process, when one of her participants was killed, she volunteered to drive a vehicle to track down and kill the participants' killer. (Lubett 2015)

Do not take on the habits of your participants:

In 1982 David Hanayo published “Joker Faces” Where he studied Californian poker players for several years. By the end of his fieldwork he stated: “I had virtually become one of the people I wanted to study.” Taking on the habits of his participants he became a poker addict. (Tedlock 1991: 70)

Do not marry your research participant:

English anthropologist Varrier Elwin went to do fieldwork in India. There he married into a tribe and became an Indian citizen. (Tedlock 1991: 70)

Do not go into the wilderness and never return:

The German anthropologist Curt Unkel went to the Amazon in Brazil to conduct fieldwork on the Indians. He never returned. This is one of the most extreme cases of going native. (Tedlock 1991: 70)

Do not become initiated with another occupation whilst doing fieldwork:

Frank Hamilton Cushing did fieldwork at Zuni Pueblo during the 1980s. There he was initiated as a war priest while still publishing ethnographic works. (Tedlock 1991: 70)

Do not become to immersed in your temporary occupation:

In 1982 American anthropologist Liza Crihfield Dalby published “Geisha”, where she studied geishas in Japan. At the end of her fieldwork on Geishas she was stated to have become “one in both body and spirit” (Tedlock 1991: 70)

disclaimer: These examples are worst case scenarios. Smaller instances of inappropriate research-participant behavior can also be problematic in fieldwork.

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